

XIII.—*A Review* of the African Dicruridae in the British Museum* †, By DAVID A. BANNERMAN, M.B.E., B.A., M.B.O.U., F.R.G.S.

WHILST naming the Drogos in the Christy collection from the Belgian Congo in the summer of 1919 I took the opportunity to work through the whole group of African *Dicruridae*.

Very little work seems to have been done on this group since Shelley's last volume (v., 1912) of the 'Birds of Africa,' edited by Mr. W. L. Selater, and Reichenow's 'Vögel Afrikas' were published.

Oberholser worked through the *adsimilis* group in the Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. xxviii. 1905, pp. 918–920, and his conclusions seem to be quite sound. As I disagree in some important points with the conclusions arrived at by Shelley and Reichenow, I here publish the results of my own investigations.

In all, I recognise 8 species and subspecies from the mainland of Africa, Fernando Po, and Zanzibar as follows:—

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| 1. <i>Dicrurus modestus modestus</i> . | Prince's Island. |
| 2. <i>Dicrurus modestus coracinus</i> . | African mainland. |
| 3. <i>Dicrurus adsimilis adsimilis</i> . | African mainland. |
| 4. <i>Dicrurus adsimilis divaricatus</i> . | African mainland and Zanzibar. |
| 5. <i>Dicrurus adsimilis atactus</i> . | African mainland. |
| 6. <i>Dicrurus atripennis</i> . | African mainland. |
| 7. <i>Dicrurus sharpei</i> . | African mainland. |
| 8. <i>Dicrurus ludwigi</i> . | African mainland. |

I have found it impossible to make anything like a really serviceable Key to this group, as where we have to depend for distinguishing characters largely on the amount and shade of the "gloss" on the plumage, and on the relative degree of "fork" in the tail, a concise Key to the species and subspecies is generally not very satisfactory. Instead I have mentioned the most striking characters, given the

* The Review here published was written in July 1919. Owing to lack of space in 'The Ibis' it has been held over by the Editor. If, in consequence, the conclusions arrived at are "out of date," the author hopes that the unavoidable delay in publishing will be taken into consideration. Owing to absence abroad he has been unable to revise the paper here submitted.

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original description, type locality, and range as shown by the magnificent series in the British Museum, and stated the number of skins in the National collection which I have examined and rearranged.

In giving the range, only skins which I have examined personally have been utilized, unless otherwise mentioned.

AFRICAN DICRURIDÆ.

1. *Dicrurus modestus modestus*.

Dicrurus modestus Hartl. Rev. et Mag. Zool. 1849, p. 495
—Type locality: Prince's Island.

Chief characters. Back velvety-black; crown of head glossed with green. Size large. Wings 131-139 mm., average 134 mm. Quill-lining dark; tail markedly forked; bill very heavy.

Range. Confined to Prince's Island.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 12.

2. *Dicrurus modestus coracinus*.

Dicrurus coracinus Verr. Rev. et Mag. Zool. 1851, p. 311
—Type locality: Gaboon.

Chief characters. Similar to *D. m. modestus*, but smaller. Wings 121-133 mm., average 128 mm. A single bird from the Upper Congo has an exceptional wing-measurement of 136 mm. (the birds on the coast are relatively smaller than those inland). Tail slightly shorter; bill shorter and less heavy.

Range. Gaboon, Cameroon, Fernando Po, Nigeria, Uganda, Upper Congo, North Angola.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 25.

Dicrurus adsimilis and subspecies.

In this division I include:—

D. adsimilis adsimilis.

D. adsimilis divaricatus.

D. adsimilis atactus.

I was at first greatly nonplussed by finding *D. adsimilis divaricatus* and *D. adsimilis atactus* both ranging to the

Gold Coast—a fact which induced me to believe without careful examination of material that the two forms must be synonymous. An examination of the birds, five *D. a. divaricatus* from the Gold Coast and thirty-five *D. a. atactus* from the type locality, did not strengthen that view. The latter birds could be distinguished by their more velvety-blue appearance and by the very dark lining to the quills (a character which does not seem to vary in *D. a. atactus* but which in *D. a. divaricatus* certainly does vary, new quills being darker and wearing lighter).

A closer examination of the Gold Coast specimens revealed the fact that birds from the coastal district were all *D. a. atactus*, those from the interior (the Hinterland) all *D. a. divaricatus*. Thus we do not have, as it first appeared, two subspecies inhabiting the same country.

A doubt as to the advisability of keeping *Dicrurus adsimilis divaricatus* (*Dicrurus afer* auctorum) separate from *D. adsimilis adsimilis* induced me to make a very thorough examination of these two forms, and the splendid material in the British Museum has enabled me to decide this point to my satisfaction.

D. adsimilis divaricatus is admittedly only distinguished from the typical form by its relatively smaller size, and whereas the former bird has an enormous range, the latter species is confined to South Africa.

“South Africa” is given as the type locality of *D. a. adsimilis*, whereas the type locality of *D. a. divaricatus* is Senegal; this is fortunate, for whereas the average wing-measurement of birds from Senegal is 129 mm., that of Cape Colony birds is 135.4 mm. The Drongos in northern Africa are obviously a smaller race than those in South Africa, but, as so often happens, the birds from the meeting-ground (Angola on the west coast and the Transvaal on the east coast) approach one another very closely in size. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult to say for certain to which form the Angola birds in particular belong.

Mr. Oberholser, in his review of the subspecies of *D. adsimilis* (Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. xxviii, 1905, pp. 918-920), noticed the same fact in the specimens from Angola which

he examined, and wrote (*l. c.* p. 920): "Examples from Angola are larger than those from more northern localities, and show in this a vergence toward true *adsimilis*, but they appear to be undoubtedly nearer *divaricatus*." I agree with Oberholser that the birds from Senegal, Senegambia, Nubia, and Somaliland seem to be the same as those from German East Africa and the Zambesi River, so that the name of *divaricatus* Lichtenstein, based on specimens from Senegambia, becomes available for this race.

I am by no means so certain that the Angola birds are best included with the northern form, for although birds having wing-measurements of only 128 mm. are found there, yet when an average is taken it is distinctly higher than the average wing-measurement of *D. a. divaricatus*. However, taking into consideration the geographical distribution of certain African forms which show a tendency to stretch from East Africa through Rhodesia into Angola, I have united the Angola birds with the North and East African race.

I would also mention that from East Africa I have found two skins, one from Tati in southern Matabeleland and the other from the Limpopo river, with wings measuring 139 mm. : although in the district inhabited by *divaricatus* these two examples, if examined without prejudice, can only be referred to the large South African race, *D. a. adsimilis*.

Thus in both West and East Africa the "lumper" can undoubtedly make out a good case for uniting *D. a. divaricatus* with *D. a. adsimilis*.

The attached table will assist future workers to determine which course they prefer to follow. For my part I consider the forms are best kept separate, and the entire group is now arranged in the Bird-Room collection on the lines laid down in this short monograph.

3. *Dicrurus adsimilis adsimilis*.

Corvus adsimilis Bechst. Latham, *Allgem. Uebers. Vögel*, ii. 1794, p. 362—Type locality: South Africa.

Chief characters. Entire upper parts glossed with blue. Size large. Wing-measurements 130–141 mm. (for average

see attached table). Quill-lining generally light, contrasting strongly with under wing-coverts, but this character is subject to a certain amount of variation; tail long and markedly forked; bill heavy.

Range. Cape Colony, Damaraland, Natal, Zululand. Single birds have been obtained (1) on the Limpopo river ("Vlei poort"), (2) at Tati on the borders of southern Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, both in the country inhabited by *D. a. divaricatus*.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 37.

Table of wing-measurements of *Dicrurus adsimilis adsimilis*.

	No. of skins.	Adult skins.	Variation in wing-measurement of adults.	Average wing-measurement of adults.
Cape Colony	13	9	132-139	135.4
Damaraland	11	9	131-139	134.5
Natal	8	5	130-141	135.6
Zululand	3	1	—	134
Orange Free State ...	1	1	—	140
*Limpopo River	1	1	—	139
*S. Matabeleland	1	1	—	139

* These districts come into the range of *D. a. divaricatus*.

4. *Dicrurus adsimilis divaricatus*.

Muscicapa divaricata Lichtenstein, Verz. Doubl. Zool. Mus. Berlin, 1823, p. 52—Type locality: Senegal.

Chief characters. Upper parts glossed with blue. Size smaller. Wing-measurements 115-136 mm. (for average see attached table). Bill slightly smaller. Quill-lining generally light, but this character is subject to a certain amount of variation, freshly moulted quills having a much darker lining than old quills, which wear lighter.

Range. Senegal, Portuguese Guinea, Gold Coast, Nigeria, Angola, Transvaal, Swaziland, Bechuanaland, N. Rhodesia, S. Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa, Nyasaland, Zanzibar, the late German East Africa, British East Africa, Uganda, Abyssinia, Somaliland, Sudan.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 170.

Table of wing-measurements of *Dicrurus
adsimilis divaricatus*.

	No. of skins.	Adult skins.	Variation in wing- measurement of adults.	Average wing- measurement of adults.
Senegal (typical birds)	12	9	121-134	129
Portuguese Guinea	3	3	125-133	129·3
Gold Coast (<i>Hinterland</i>) ...	5	4	122-130	123·2
Nigeria	6	4	124-131	129
Angola	6	5	128-136	132
<i>Transvaal</i>	10	7	125-136	131·3
<i>Swaziland</i>	1	0	—	—
<i>Bechuanaland</i>	1	0	—	—
<i>N. Rhodesia & S. Rhodesia</i> (Mashonaland, Gazaland, and Matabeleland)	12	10	125-131	127·6
<i>Portuguese E. Africa</i> (<i>Zam- besi</i> specimens)	17	11	115-131	122·7
<i>Nyasaland</i>	10	4	122-132	126·2
<i>Zanzibar</i>	1	1	—	124
The late <i>German E. Africa</i> .	5	4	118-124	122·2
<i>British E. Africa</i>	16	14	117-134	121·9
<i>Uganda</i>	11	10	120-133	127·7
<i>Abyssinia</i>	21	15	119-132	124
<i>Somaliland</i>	20	16	118-129	122·1
<i>Sudan</i> (White Nile)	13	10	119-131	123·7

5. *Dicrurus adsimilis atactus*.

Dicrurus modestus atactus Oberholser, Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. xxii. 1899, p. 35—Type locality: Fantec, Gold Coast.

Chief characters. Upper parts, head, neck, and entire back glossed with deep velvety-blue. Size large. Wing-measurements of thirty-five specimens from the type locality: variation 122-138 mm., average 127·7 mm. Wing-measurements of forty-four adult skins from West Africa (including typical birds): variation 122-138 mm., average 128·2 mm. Quill-lining dark, showing no variation; bill heavy; tail markedly forked. Easily distinguished from *D. m. coracinus*, the other large mainland species, by having the nape and back glossed instead of dull, and by having a longer bill.

Range. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gold Coast (typical), Togoland.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 51.

6. *Dicrurus atripennis*.

Dicrurus atripennis Swains. Birds West Africa, i. 1837, p. 256—Type locality: Sierra Leone.

Chief characters. Upper parts and breast highly glossed with steel-blue (more green than blue). Size rather large. Wings 106–122 mm., average of twenty-three skins 113·1 mm.; tail almost square.

Range. Sierra Leone (typical), Gold Coast, Northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Gaboon, Belgian Congo.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 26 (typical locality not represented).

7. *Dicrurus sharpei*.

Dicrurus sharpei Oustalet, N. Arch. Mus. Paris, 1879, p. 97—Type locality: Gaboon.

Chief characters. Upper parts blue, not highly glossed, the blue deeper and duller than in *atripennis*. Smaller. Wings 101–112 mm., average of eighteen skins 106·5 mm.; tail square and shorter than in *atripennis*.

Range. Senegal, Portuguese Guinea, Gold Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gaboon (typical), Belgian Congo, N. Angola.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 18.

8. *Dicrurus ludwigi*.

Edolius ludwigi Smith, S. Afr. Quart. Journ. 1834, p. 144—Type locality: Port Natal.

Chief characters. Entire upper and under parts glossed with greyish-green. Size small: wings 94–107 mm., average of twenty-two skins with a wing-measurement of 101·2 mm. Quill-lining dark; tail distinctly forked. It is distinguished from *D. atripennis* by its shorter, narrower bill and by the more forked tail, and by having the outer tail-feathers more angular.

Range. Natal (typical), Zululand, Portuguese East Africa, Rhodesia, Nyasaland, the late German East Africa, Belgian Congo.

Number of skins in the British Museum: 23.